

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE  
JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

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# HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES IN PUBLIC HOUSING

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September 2022



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# INTRODUCTION



According to its [2022 Fact Sheet](#), the New York City Housing Authority (“NYCHA”), is home to over 535,686 New Yorkers residing within its public housing, Section 8, and Permanent Affordability Commitment Together/Rental Assistance Demonstration (“PACT/RAD”) programs. NYCHA holds the distinction of being one of the [Worst Landlords](#) in the city, a title it has earned several years in a row. Despite years of promises and decades of varying plans, NYCHA’s housing stock has continued to decline, even under the watchful eye of a federal monitor and the leadership of several appointed Chairs of the NYCHA Board.

Earlier this year, my staff and I went to several developments across the five boroughs to speak with NYCHA residents, visit their apartments, listen to their concerns, and demand urgent repairs. Prior to embarking on this tour, we had an idea of what we were going to find. What we saw and heard on our recent citywide tour did not surprise us, and with that lack of surprise comes anger and indignation.

This report is entitled “How the Other Half Lives,” in reference to the book published in 1903 by Jacob Riis. Riis’ book was a study of life in the tenements of New York City, and it exposed the uninhabitable and unsafe conditions for families on the Lower East Side and in Five Points. The book shocked the public, and sweeping reforms in both housing and labor law then followed. Riis himself also worked alongside then-NYC Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt and Social Worker Lillian Wald to bring about new housing regulations and standards that are still in effect today.

Today, much of NYC’s public housing is as fundamentally uninhabitable and unsafe as were the tenements in 1903. Jacob Riis’ book brought attention to tenants’ living conditions and resulted in systemic change to New York’s tenements. Similarly, this report advocates for better housing conditions for NYCHA residents in all five boroughs. 2,000 of the 177,000 NYCHA units bear Jacob Riis’ name; it’s past time they lived up to his legacy.

NYCHA residents also need leaders at all levels to come together to advocate for and prioritize their needs, health, and safety. Leaders at the local, state, and federal level must work together to supply resources including the funds needed to support New Yorkers living in public housing.

Conditions in too many NYCHA apartments are entirely unlivable. Our team saw apartments where children were bathed in bathrooms filled with black mold. We saw senior citizens struggle to move around decrepit apartments ruined from years of water damage. We saw parents forced to feed their children without cooking gas for the better part of a year. We saw families huddled together without heat or hot water during the bitter January cold. Open work orders are at a new peak – as of November 2021, there were 600,480 open work orders in NYCHA buildings across the city. This is an increase of over 121,600 from the previous year. Our fellow New Yorkers are suffering, and we cannot and will not ignore their needs.

After touring developments across the city, it is even more clear that NYCHA's funding and management issues need urgent attention. Alongside residents, we have crafted legislative measures that would have a direct positive impact on the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who call NYCHA home.

We have an obligation to provide safe, decent, and quality housing – an obligation that NYCHA management has failed to live up to. This report is a first step towards documenting and examining the needs of our fellow New Yorkers, and we will not stop fighting until every person in our city has a safe place to call home.

In advocacy,

Jumaane D. Williams

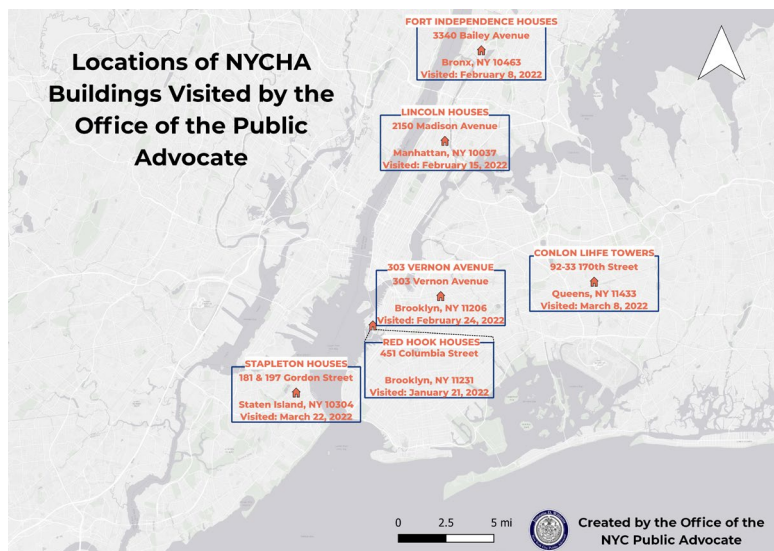




## BACKGROUND



*Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams hosts a press conference outside of NYCHA Fort Independence Houses on February 8, 2022*



In December 2021, Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams released the year's [Worst Landlord Watchlist](#); the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) topped the list for the fourth year running.

On January 21, 2022, in the midst of record numbers of heating and hot water outages, the Office of the Public Advocate embarked on its first NYCHA Citywide Five Borough tour in order to document what is known and has been reported through the worst landlord list. These are the dates and the NYCHA developments visited:

- January 21, 2022: Red Hook Houses in Brooklyn visiting the homes of four residents
- February 8, 2022: Fort Independence Houses in the Bronx visiting the homes of two residents
- February 15, 2022: Lincoln Houses in Manhattan visiting the homes of two residents
- February 24, 2022: 303 Vernon Ave. in Brooklyn visiting the homes of four residents
- March 8, 2022: Conlon Lihfe Towers in Queens visiting the homes of five residents
- March 22, 2022: Stapleton Houses in Staten Island visiting the homes of three residents

In the first three months of the year, the Office of the Public Advocate toured NYCHA developments in all five boroughs and met with eighty-three residents. Contact was also made with several other developments and residents which were not a part of the tour. Below is a chart of all of the developments, homes, and residents that the Office of the Public Advocate (“OPA”) contacted in this campaign to hold NYCHA accountable:

No.	Date	Borough	Site	Number of Homes OPA visited	Total Number of residents contacted
1	01/21/22	Brooklyn	Red Hook Houses	4	19
2	02/08/22	Bronx	Fort Independence Houses	2	7
3	02/15/22	Manhattan	Lincoln Houses	2	10
4	02/24/22	Brooklyn	303 Vernon Ave, Sumner & Bedstuy Rehab	4	8
5	03/08/22	Queens	Conlon Lihfe Towers Houses	5	8
6	03/22/22	Staten Island	Stapleton Houses	3	11
<b>Totals</b>				<b>20</b>	<b>63</b>

## CHRONICALLY UNDERFUNDED AND INSTITUTIONALLY SEPARATED

NYCHA has been chronically underfunded and needs approximately \$40 billion to address capital needs, but money is only part of the issue.<sup>1</sup> For decades, NYCHA residents and advocates have pushed for significant changes and still end up with the same impermissible living conditions.<sup>2</sup> While change has been promised, it has not arrived. Currently, the city has a series of 10-year plans to allocate billions of dollars to build and preserve housing and although NYCHA is included, it will not have any meaningful impact on the buildings and the residents who live there. For example, in the current Fiscal Year (July 1st, 2022 until June 30th, 2023), the administration will allocate \$22 billion for the preservation or creation of affordable housing<sup>3</sup>, but NYCHA will receive only \$500 million<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-end-nycha-blame-game-20211007-krsuafwsmza3lfagybamk-p7y34-story.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/393-22/mayor-adams-outlines-blueprint-housing-our-neighbors-plan-get-new-yorkers-safe-#/0>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/office-of-the-mayor/2022/Housing-Blueprint.pdf>



Unfortunately, a one-time \$40 billion in capital funds cannot solve everything. While \$40 billion can fix a lot of repairs and structural issues, it cannot entirely and completely revitalize what is an already aging and neglected housing stock.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, money alone also cannot fix the institutional and systemic issues inside NYCHA's management.

Fixing NYCHA is also a racial justice issue. According to housing authority statistics, about 88% of NYCHA families are Black or Hispanic.<sup>6</sup> NYCHA residents are also more likely to be low income, with their average gross income less than \$25,000,<sup>7</sup> while the median household income in New York City is \$67,046.<sup>8</sup> With such limited disposable income, many NYCHA residents have nowhere to turn even when their apartments are filled with health and safety violations that go unfixed.

NYCHA is excluded from the city's housing code enforcement, a system many of its residents view as a "separate and unequal" structure. In a particularly shocking case, residents from Carleton Manor in Queens sued NYCHA for failing to provide both heat and hot water in their homes for months. Judge Kimon Thermos, who presided over the case, noted that if NYCHA was instead a small private landlord, they would certainly be in jail, forced to pay an accumulated amount of fines for all the apartments, and lose the building.<sup>9</sup>

In November 2021, City Council passed [Local Law 127-2021](#), which allows NYCHA residents to log their complaints regarding needed repairs and services with the New York City 311 complaint line. This law took effect in April 2022. Prior to the passage of this law, NYCHA residents could only call NYCHA's Customer Contact Center and were prohibited from logging the complaints on the 311 system. The law mandates that 311's central complaint line must register complaints from any New York City resident. Under the 311 system, all landlords, including NYCHA, will be informed of any and all complaints. Additionally, the law requires 311 to annually publish a searchable database of all the complaints received. Ensuring NYCHA residents' complaints are logged, registered, and aggregated into a publicly available and searchable database is an essential first step. It is also nowhere near enough, or all that our neighbors in NYCHA deserve.

Once a complaint is logged, more steps must be taken before an official violation is issued. Currently, the process is as follows for residents of privately owned buildings:

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5 [Ibid.](#)

6 <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/Resident-Data-Book-Summary-2021.pdf>

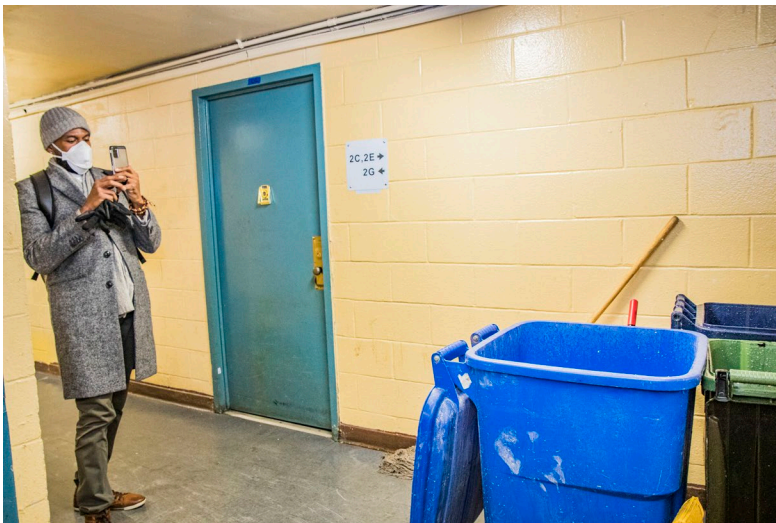
7 [Ibid](#)

8 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newyorkcitynewyork/HSG010221>

9 <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-queens-nycha-tenants-no-hot-water-judge-jail-20220206-6k72w3tb6negfikjhfl66avlqi-story.html>

residents are visited by a New York City inspector, and if that inspector finds a problem, he or she will issue an official violation. Each violation received will accrue fines if it is not fixed within a certain time frame. Unfortunately, Local Law 127-2021 does not extend that same process for NYCHA residents. Instead, if NYCHA residents want to know what violations exist in their apartment or building, then they need to sue NYCHA for repairs in a Housing Part (“HP”) Action in Housing Court before an inspector will come and write up any existing violations. While residents in privately owned buildings will have violations logged into the NYC system without commencing an HP Action, NYCHA residents are forced to take additional measures to secure repairs for safe housing.

## FINDINGS FROM NYCHA CITYWIDE FIVE BOROUGH TOUR



*Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams takes a photo inside of Fort Independence Houses*

New York City, and the New York City Housing Authority, is failing its residents who most need support. The living conditions in the buildings the Office of the Public Advocate toured were unacceptable and shameful. NYCHA is forcing the elderly, disabled, parents, and children to live without basic amenities. Every New Yorker deserves a healthy and safe living environment;

meanwhile, too many are forced to go without the most fundamental necessities just to keep a roof over their heads.

Residents lamented inaccessible and inefficient management at all levels. Even when complaints are made, too often nothing is done. Many NYCHA residents do not speak English, and they're forced to find translators. There is absolutely no structure in place to ensure that management is taking tangible actions on a consistent basis to resolve



complaints. Unfortunately, these issues all predate the pandemic, but the past two years have magnified and deepened existing failures.

During his first one hundred days, Mayor Eric Adams announced his intention to create NYCHA Stat. The mayor has yet to elaborate on when or how the program will work. However, if NYCHA Stat is modeled after the 1994 groundbreaking NYPD CompStat program, then it should be implemented immediately to bring much needed accountability and transparency to the neverending list of needed repairs at NYCHA buildings.<sup>10</sup> CompStat lowered crime rates while providing essential information in real time to analyze crime statistics and implement a variety of crime fighting measures, and, if implemented correctly, NYCHA Stat could bring this technology to help shorten NYCHA's long list of outstanding repairs as well as wait times.

There was a time when NYCHA was the premier public housing stock in the United States. NYCHA, created in 1935, was and continues to be the largest Public Housing Authority with nearly 180,000 units in nearly 3,000 buildings. For many lower income families, this was the safe, decent, and affordable housing that they desired. Then, in the 1990s, New York State and New York City stopped funding NYCHA. In 1998, Governor Pataki terminated operating funds to 15 NYCHA developments created and financed by the State.<sup>11</sup> In 2001, Mayor Giuliani reduced the city's annual operating contributions from \$34 million to \$30 million.<sup>12</sup> By the time Mayor Bloomberg took office, just months post 9/11, he terminated operating funds to six city-financed NYCHA developments.<sup>13</sup> NYCHA has faced deep disinvestment for decades. Meanwhile, the federal government continuously decreases its allocation per unit for all public housing authorities causing many other cities and states to demolish some of its public housing stock.

For far too long, residents living at NYCHA developments, who are majority Black and Brown, have been ignored and have not received the support needed to ensure quality living. There is a cyclical trend that continues within NYCHA that needs to be exposed and addressed. During the Office of the Public Advocate's NYCHA home visits, there were six recurring issues that came up for almost every location which included: (1) the widespread and recurring mold problems, (2) rodent and insect infestations, (3) elevator service interruptions, (4) broken fire exit doors, (5) security concerns, and (6) consistent lack of hot water and no heat due to the mishandling of boiler outages during the winter months.

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10 <https://www.cityandstateny.com/politics/2022/03/council-member-colleagues-dont-bother-giving-nycha-your-money/362931/>

11 [https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/Third\\_City\\_-\\_web\\_3\\_1\\_2017.pdf](https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/Third_City_-_web_3_1_2017.pdf)

12 [https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/CSS\\_NYCHA\\_FinalWeb.pdf](https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/CSS_NYCHA_FinalWeb.pdf)

13 [https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/Third\\_City\\_-\\_web\\_3\\_1\\_2017.pdf](https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/Third_City_-_web_3_1_2017.pdf)



## MOLD ISSUES

Since January 31, 2019, after the Manhattan U.S. Attorney uncovered a longstanding pattern of duplicity and mismanagement, NYCHA has been overseen by a Federal Monitor. The Federal Monitor has provided extensive findings in the HUD Agreement Action Plan regarding NYCHA's mismanagement, negligence, and lack of compliance with city, state and federal regulations. Despite the Federal Monitor, NYCHA is woefully unequipped to meet the needs of its residents; as of November 2021, NYCHA has 600,480 open work orders – an increase of more than 120,000 from the same point in 2020.

Despite the additional oversight and orders from the appointed Federal Monitor, NYCHA has continued to fail to resolve unsafe and dangerous repair issues, including issues stemming from water leakage and poor ventilation. This winter, the Office of the Public Advocate also saw many cases of widespread leaks, mold, and mildew complaints.

In 2019, there were nearly 35,000 mold work orders reported,<sup>14</sup> many of which were recurring cases. This typically happens when mold is neither identified nor properly eliminated. In order to prevent mold, the source of moisture must be removed. Mold thrives when water is where it shouldn't be – a common occurrence in NYCHA apartments – whether it drips from leaking pipes, defective or broken window seals, leaking roofs, defective masonry pointing, or leaking bathroom and kitchen fixtures.

The Federal Monitor's action plan provided NYCHA with two deadlines to address the mold and leak problems: Phase I was supposed to be completed within two years of January 31, 2019, and Phase II was supposed to be completed within five years of January 31, 2019.<sup>15</sup> Based on what the Public Advocate and the OPA staff observed, NYCHA did not comply with the January 31, 2019 Phase I deadline. At the time of the Five Borough Tour, NYCHA was commencing year 4 of the 5 year plan despite never completing the agreed upon goals of Phase I.

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14 <https://nychamonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FINAL-NYCHA-Mold-Action-Plan-3.9.2020-003.pdf>

15 *Ibid.*



## Brooklyn: 303 Vernon Ave



*A mold-infested, decaying wall inside of a bathroom at 303 Vernon Ave.*



*A wall destroyed to the core by mold in the hallway*



*Another wall and active leak in the bathroom*



*The wall in the living room is missing multiple layers of plaster*



*The wall behind the kitchen sink has been destroyed by water damage*

At the time of this visit, Ms. R, a mother of six children and resident at 303 Vernon Ave, was expecting her seventh child. Her apartment, as well as many other residents who lived on the Building's "G Line," was overrun by mold and mildew due to water damage and moisture caused by leaks in the wall. Evidence was found in the bathroom and living room. Ms. R stated that each time repairs were made, NYCHA workers simply plastered and painted to cover-up the signs of mold. Since a proper mold abatement was never done, each time paint and plaster was applied, the mold would return. Ms. R and her children all became very ill due to the constant exposure to the toxic mold and mildew. Several of her children experienced asthma and other respiratory distress. On January 25th, the Administration of Children Services (ACS) relocated the family to a shelter temporarily until the mold was properly removed. However, when Ms. R returned to provide access for mold remediation, she was met by a worker who was there to

“only” plaster and paint. She refused the work, knowing that the work required complete removal of the mold-riddled walls. After two months of waiting for repairs, on April 1st, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) evicted the family from the shelter based on the technicality of “not being homeless.” Ms. R, who was eight months pregnant, at that time, with six children had no choice but to return to the unhealthy and unsafe apartment.



*Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams hosts a press conference with fellow elected officials and residents at 303 Vernon Ave. on February 24, 2022*

On April 6th, it was confirmed by NYCHA’s Mold & Mildew Unit that there was a leak on the “G Line,” which extended into the building’s hallway, where the ceiling had collapsed. NYCHA staff discovered the root cause of the leak and determined that the leak and water damage was the cause for the mold and mildew in all of the apartments on the G Line. Ms. R’s apartment was unsafe and uninhabitable. The family was approved for an emergency transfer, and a new apartment was identified for relocation; however, the family had to wait another week before they could move. Since the family could not return to the DHS shelter because they had a home, OPA recommended having the family stay in a hotel for the week until NYCHA moved the family and their belongings (at no cost to them) to the new location. NYCHA followed the OPA’s recommendation.



Ms. R's last night at the hotel was on April 11th, but it took her another week to coordinate with NYCHA's moving vendors that were hired to help her family move to the new location. On April 22nd, OPA visited Ms. R and found that the new location was not much of an improvement. Although the apartment was freshly painted, there were signs of shoddy work and disrepairs including the following:

1. Blistering and bubbling paint on the walls and unsanded surfaces.
2. Paint over appliances and/or droplets found in the Move-In Ready apartment:



*Paint on the light fixtures*



*Paint over the bathroom sink*



*Paint over the radiator*

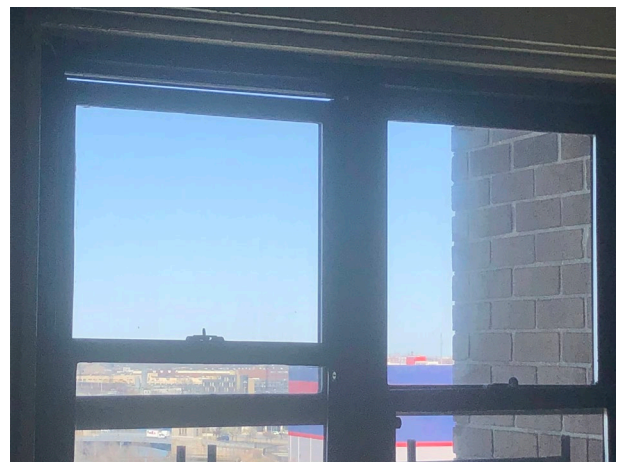


*Paint over the intercom*

- a. Light fixtures
  - b. Doors, windows and floors
  - c. Bathroom sink
  - d. Radiators
  - e. Intercom (not working) and the building entrance is unlocked
3. Gap openings around electrical switch plates
  4. Electrical sockets are out of alignment and do not work in the bathroom.
  5. Vents in the bathroom do not work.



*There are gaps between the electrical switch plates and the wall*



*The window cannot properly close; a gap remains between the edge of the glass and the window frame*



6. Gaps in the window frames and the windows did not close properly.
7. Leak under the kitchen sink.
8. The gap between the kitchen cabinet and the wall looks like the cabinet could fall.
9. Building is completely closed in by fences and scaffolding. The children are completely cut off from the playground.
10. Lack of security. Many non-NYCHA residents are trespassing in the NYCHA buildings and grounds.
11. OPA found a resident sitting in front of the building with a pitbull that weighs more than 40 pounds, which is far above the 25 pound limit for pets according to [NYCHA's Pet Policy Overview](#).

Ms. R believes that this is her best option at this time. Ms. R delivered a healthy baby boy on May 16th. Mother and child are doing well under the circumstances, but they still do not have the safe housing they deserve.

### Queens: Conlon Lihfe Towers



[Click the image to see the video.](#)



*Water damage over the shower*

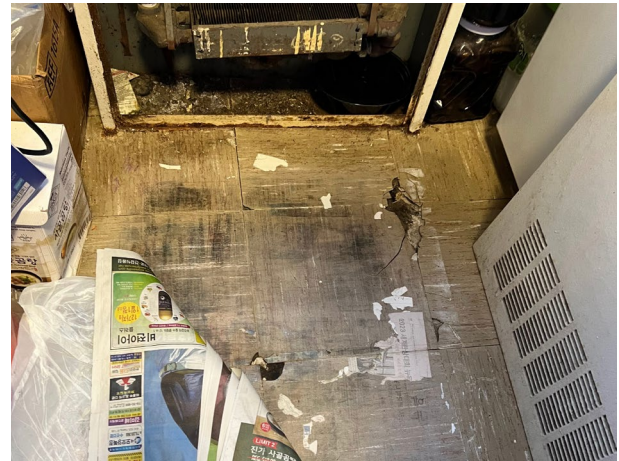
Residents at Conlon Lihfe Towers (Senior Resident Development) were living with black mold and mildew due to constant floods from the roof. [The visible crack paint of the interior ceiling on the top floor is evidence of years of unaddressed damage.](#) Mr. OJ

and his wife had leaks from the ceiling in their bathroom for over two years that led to black mold. There was also a leak from the radiator in the kitchen that damaged their kitchen tiles. Mr. OJ spoke to NYCHA's central and local management staff several times, but there was no follow up. He and his wife, like many NYCHA residents throughout NYC, suffered from the infamous and inexplicable NYCHA practice of closing complaints tickets

as resolved or fixed when no one is home. This creates a vicious cycle: a resident logs a complaint, NYCHA closes the complaint as resolved, and the resident logs the same complaint again.



*Broken tiles in the bedroom from years of water damage from the radiator*

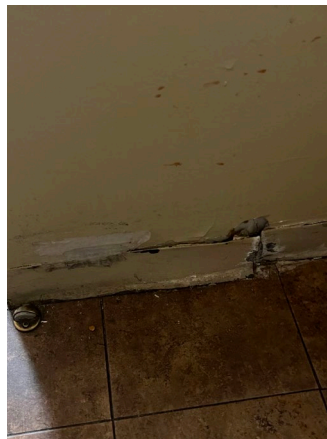


*A radiator leak has caused broken and damaged floor tiles*

A few years ago, Ms. LR left her window open while she was hospitalized. She came home to find her apartment flooded and the tiles destroyed in her living room. Despite being an older disabled woman, the manager of her building reportedly told her she needed to fix the damage herself.



*Broken tiles from flooding*



*The door also has damage from the flood*



*There is water damage around the window from years of leaks*



*Mold Poster*

Another resident, Ms. RJ, said that NYCHA is aware that there is mold throughout the building and should do inspections to find the source of origin, but instead, they are leaving it up to the residents to inform them. There are even informational posters about mold throughout the building. NYCHA knows many of the residents do not speak English, but it's still up to the residents to find the mold and then report it.

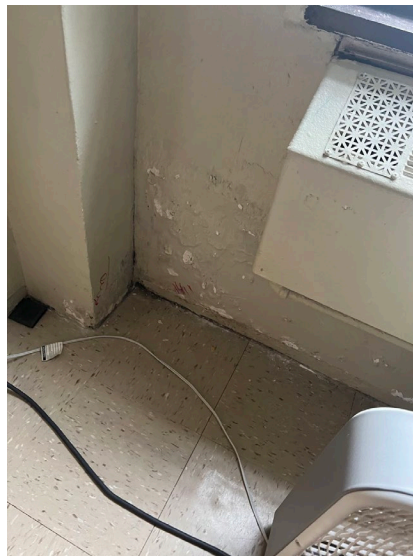


## Staten Island: Stapleton Houses

Residents at Stapleton Houses also have a mold infestation, and NYCHA has again failed to fix any of the leaks. This also clogged up ventilation and terrace drains. There were five residents that had significant and dangerous amounts of mold in their bathroom or living room. Three even had black mold. One resident had been dealing with mold for so long she did the repairs herself; NYCHA told her that they did not have a contractor and she ended up doing 60% of the work. According to the action plan that NYCHA agreed to participate in, the mold issues mentioned above should have been addressed. However, even with an action plan in place, nothing is implemented. Instead, residents face excessive filth in their homes and unsanitary and unhealthy conditions – leading to illness in some cases – without communication or resolutions from management.



*Leaks in the wall*



*Leaks in the wall baseboard*



*Leaky bathroom sink*



*Black mold on the ceiling*



*Black mold on the pipe and wall*



*More black mold*



# RODENT AND INSECT INFESTATIONS

## Queens: Conlon Lihfe Towers

Another major issue that residents face is persistent rodent and insect infestations. Residents across the city showed the Office of the Public Advocate holes in their walls and doors that allow easy access for rats and roaches into their homes, as well as clear evidence of pests in their homes.

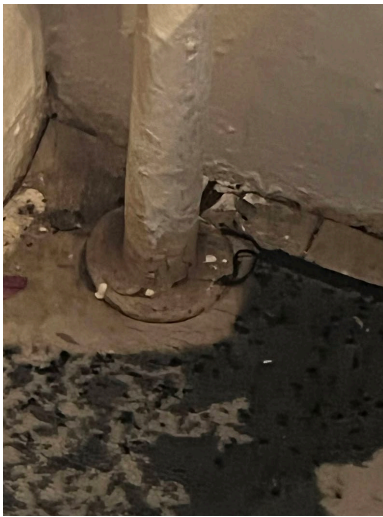


*Mice hole in the wall*

At Conlon Lihfe Towers, the Office of the Public Advocate met with three residents facing pest infestations. Ms. CJ has been living in her current apartment for five years now, and for two out of the five years, she put in tickets for a hole in her apartment near the door – an entryway mice use to enter her apartment. It still has not been fixed. Another resident dealt with the same issue for two years. [Ms. SG had a hole in her living room and dining room where the mice used to enter, but instead of fixing the hole, Ms. SG informed us that maintenance just boarded it up.](#) This repair would not even qualify as a repair to remove an existing violation anywhere else in New York City. Finally, Ms. DJ moved into her apartment last April and found two dead mice. There

are several holes in the closet where the mice would come into her apartment, so she also stuffed the holes with steel wool pads, but the mice still enter from that opening. In the evening when she turns off the lights, she can hear them in the room. When she turns the lights on, she sees them scatter.

Residents also mentioned that the recycling bins have been removed from the building and residents do not know what to do with their recyclables, so they leave them outside in the hallway. This attracts pests and rodents.



*Mouse droppings*

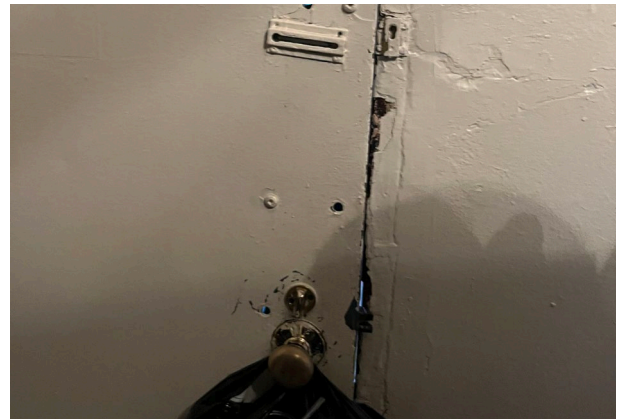
## **Staten Island: Stapleton Houses**

There were several residents from Stapleton Houses who also spoke about rodent and insect infestations. One resident, Ms. FR, showed clear evidence of mice droppings in their apartment. Subsequently, Ms. FR, her husband, and their children developed Lyme Disease. Ticks that feed on mice blood can become infected with Lyme disease, and then go on to infect humans. Ms. FR's family, especially her two young children, have suffered greatly since becoming infected and only recently became healthy enough to return to school.

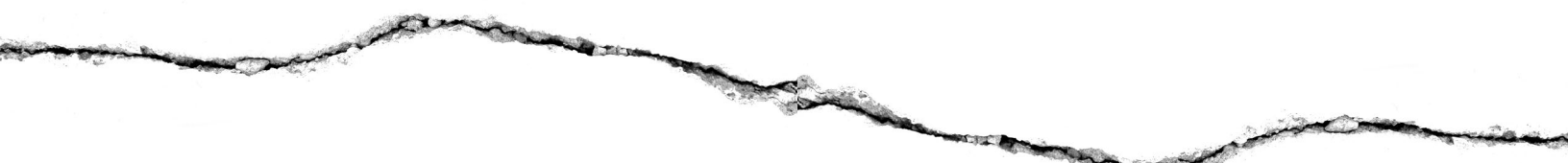
Another family, the Office of the Public Advocate visited, had a clear gap between their front door and the doorframe – an easy entryway for mice and roaches. These infestations led to unsanitary conditions for the parents and their children, and a home that will continue to be unsafe if nothing is done.



*Gap at the bottom of a door where pests gain entrance.*



*Gap on the side of a door.*



## ELEVATOR SERVICE INTERRUPTIONS

Across the city, New York’s public housing residents continue to suffer from elevator outages. This is an inconvenience for everyone, but a disaster for the elderly, disabled, and anyone living on the higher floors. According to the Service Interruption data found on NYCHA’s Website, there were more than 2,265 elevator outages for 39 Buildings at the 6 NYCHA developments on the tour. This would average to about 43 breakdowns per week and each outage would last about 12 hours. Below is a compilation of the number of elevator service interruptions that has occurred at each NYCHA development that the Office of the Public Advocate visited from January 2020 to February 2022. Even after two years of persistent outages, residents are still facing this issue.

No.	Boro	Site	# of Buildings	# of Elevators Out of Service	Average # Breakdowns Per Week
1	Brooklyn	Red Hook West Houses	15	758	14.5
2	Bronx	Fort Independence Houses	1	240	4.5
3	Manhattan	Lincoln Houses	14	941	18
4	Brooklyn	303 Vernon Avenue	1	48	1
5	Queens	Conlon Lihfe Towers Houses	1	68	1
6	Staten Island	Stapleton Houses	7	210	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>39</b>			<b>2,265</b>	<b>43</b>

One resident at Fort Independence Houses said that the elevators are constantly broken and out of service. There is only one functioning elevator and some days it works and others it does not.<sup>16</sup>

### Manhattan: Lincoln Houses

Residents at Lincoln Houses complained of nonfunctional elevators as well as slippery stairwells. When it’s impossible to enter and leave buildings safely, walker and wheelchair

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.amny.com/news/bronx-residents-of-fort-independence-houses-continue-to-suffer/>



users are forced to remain in their apartments or wait in building lobbies until repairs are finished – which can sometimes take up to 12 hours. Elevators are essential for disabled NYCHA residents to access their community, food, medical treatment, and prescriptions.<sup>17</sup> To other people, this issue might be a hassle, but for those individuals who use a walker and wheelchair, it is an alarming safety issue.<sup>18</sup>

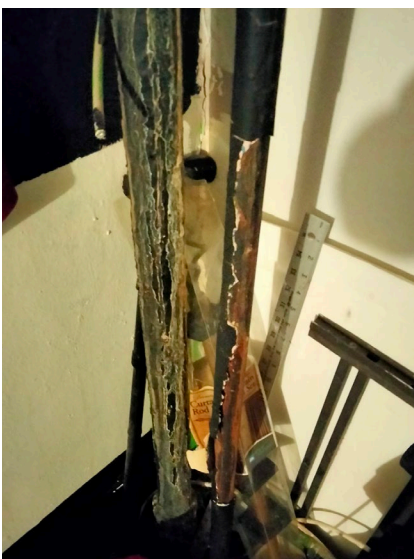


*Resident at Lincoln Houses speaks to First Deputy Public Advocate Nick E. Smith and Council Member Kristin Richardson Jordan*

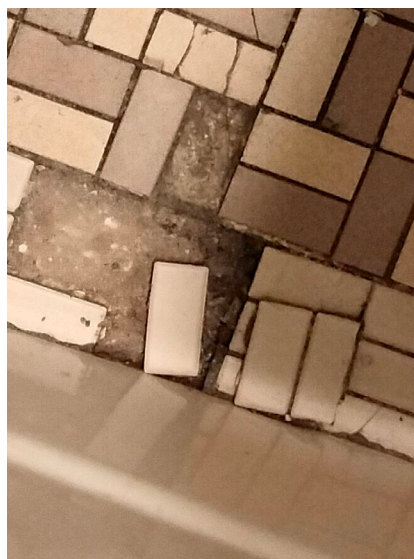


*First Deputy Public Advocate Nick E. Smith hosts a press conference outside of Lincoln Houses*

This was the Office of the Public Advocate's second visit to Lincoln Houses. This development was selected for the Public Advocate's Worst Landlord Five Borough Tour on December 16th, 2019. Residents saw improvements and received repairs following the first visit. Although this was the case, [the shoddy repairs deteriorated and residents now feel that their issues have gotten even worse](#). Lincoln Resident Association Treasurer, Rena Marie Mugin, said, "It seems as if NYCHA needs the Public Advocate to supervise their work."



*Rusted/Leaky Pipes*



*Broken bathroom tiles*



*Close-up of broken tiles*

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.insider.com/new-york-public-housing-elevator-breakdowns-people-with-disabilities-2019-9>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

## BROKEN FIRE EXIT DOORS



*Henry Butler, District Manager for Community Board 3 Brooklyn, speaks to the Public Advocate about NYCHA's Broken Fire Safety Doors*

### Brooklyn: 303 Vernon Ave

Self-closing doors – doors that swing shut and completely close and latch when opened – are essential for preventing the spread of smoke and fire. On January 9, 2022, fire broke out on a lower floor of Twin Park North building in the Bronx. This fire became exponentially worse due to two malfunctioning doors that remained open, allowing smoke and flames to engulf the building and kill seventeen New Yorkers. Despite this clear and present danger,

we found several malfunctioning self-closing fire safety doors. Several were hallway doors leading to staircases that could not close, had missing or broken knobs, and/or cracked or missing windows. [Local Law 111-2018](#) requires any door that opens into a hallway, stairway, apartment or other common area (enclosed or open) to be self-closing. This legislation included a July 31, 2021 deadline for citywide requirements to have these self-closing doors installed. Evidently, NYCHA has failed once again to comply with government mandates.

## SECURITY CONCERNS

Many NYCHA developments struggle with persistent security issues, many of which stem from negligence. Even when money is made available to improve building security, the funding allocated by elected officials can sit untouched for years. On March 8, 2022, during the City Council preliminary budget hearing held jointly by the Committees on

Finance and on Public Housing, Council Member Rafael Salamanca Jr. called out NYCHA for failure to spend \$3 million he allocated in Fiscal Year 2018 for layered access security renovations for a NYCHA development in Melrose.<sup>19</sup> The Melrose development needs this funding: 14 shootings took place across Melrose, Mott Haven, and Port Morris;<sup>20</sup> nine people were murdered; and three NYPD officers were shot.<sup>21</sup> After these incidents, money was allocated for NYCHA to create a layered access system that included the installation of new cameras to ensure the safety of residents.<sup>22</sup> However, when ABC New York visited the development, they found few cameras.<sup>23</sup> Even at the stairwell where the NYPD officers were shot, there was not a single camera on site.<sup>24</sup> On every floor and stairwell, there were no signs of security cameras.<sup>25</sup>

Nearly five years later, the Melrose residents are still waiting. NYCHA claims that the layered access improvements will be completed in another year, but every year they delay doing the work, prices for equipment and labor increase. Every year, Councilmember Salamanca's \$3 million buys less.



*The Conlon Lihfe Building*

### **Queens: Conlon Lihfe Towers**

Similarly, in 2020, Conlon Lihfe senior residents told WPIX 11 News that even after the City Council allocated funding for security upgrades four years ago, they live in constant fear due to lack of security in their building.<sup>26</sup> Resident Association President Joyce Hutton, 80, who has been a NYCHA resident for 47 years and has lived in the building since 2015, said that since the pandemic, security concerns have gotten even worse. In 2017, Council Member Daneek Miller allocated \$320,000 to NYCHA to enhance security at the building with cameras, following years of complaints to his office and seniors living in fear.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.cityandstateny.com/politics/2022/03/council-member-colleagues-dont-bother-giving-nycha-your-money/362931/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/19/nyregion/in-a-bronx-police-precinct-homicides-persist-as-crime-drops-elsewhere.html>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> <https://abc7ny.com/investigators-nycha-public-housing-cameras/1380306/>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> <https://pix11.com/news/monica-makes-it-happen/nycha-seniors-fear-for-their-safety-councilman-says-he-allocated-money-for-improvements-years-ago/>





*First Deputy Public Advocate Nick E. Smith hosts a press conference with resident leaders and elected officials outside of Conlon Lihfe Towers*

The Council Member requested a Security Guard during the day to prevent harassment, intimidation, slow down unauthorized entry into the building behind residents, and to enforce the use of masks. To date, those security improvements are still pending.

## PLUMBING, HEATING, AND BOILER ISSUES

A majority of the residents living within these six NYCHA development sites have faced issues with sporadic, insufficient, or a complete lack of heat and hot water. The residents informed the Office of the Public Advocate that NYCHA has done nothing about it, and if they did, their support was unhelpful.

According to the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the heat season lasts from October 1st to May 31st.<sup>27</sup> During the day, all residential buildings owners are required to maintain indoor temperatures at 68 degrees when outdoor temperatures are below 55 degrees.<sup>28</sup> At night, indoor temperatures must be a minimum of 62 degrees.<sup>29</sup> Hot water must be provided 365 days per year at a constant minimum temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Below includes further information on the total number of NYCHA heat and hot water outages from October 1st to February 2nd for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022:

27 <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/news/052-21/hpd-beginning-2021-2022-heat-season-new-york-city#/0>

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

	Oct. 2020 - Feb. 2021 No Heat	Oct. 2020 - Feb. 2021 No Hot Water	Oct. 2020 - Feb. 2021 Total: No Heat + Hot Water	Oct. 2021 - Feb. 2022 No Heat	Oct. 2021 - Feb. 2022 No Hot Water	Oct. 2021 - Feb. 2022 Total: No Heat + Hot Water
# Of Outages	329	539	868	459	761	1,220
# Of Apts	93,060	103,810	111,950	110,342	117,266	123,789
# Of Residents	202,447	228,207	244,337	238,460	254,987	268,332
Development Outages	207	253	460	303	427	730
Building Outages	83	215	298	106	259	365

## Brooklyn: Red Hook Houses

There has clearly been a drastic increase across the board for each category.



*Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams, Council Member Alexa Avilés, residents, and staff navigate the maze-like fencing, which has been up for years at NYCHA Red Hook Houses. Residents say, “it’s like being in a prison.”*

Residents living at Red Hook Houses are facing persistent issues with heat and hot water. The Office of the Public Advocate visited two older adult residents in Red Hook: one with either little to no heat at night, and one with no running hot water. The older



adult without heat also had a tracheotomy tube, which makes it even more unhealthy and dangerous to live without heat. Both residents said that the issues have remained for months, and NYCHA has yet to address them.



*Ms. VH speaks with Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams*



*Council Member Alexa Avilés speaks with Ms. JN and the Public Advocate.*



*Both Ms. JN and Ms. RJ speak with Council Member Avilés and the Public Advocate*

Another resident, Ms. VH, noted that the hot water in their apartment fluctuates and never reaches the required minimum temperature. She does not have hot water in the morning or evening, but sometimes has hot water in the afternoon. Similarly, Ms. JN had no heat, and it has been on and off for about a year. Management provided the building with a temporary boiler last year, but it has been replaced several times without prior notice to residents. Both residents complained that work order tickets go unanswered, and when they open the tickets there is a long wait, only to discover that the work order has been inexplicably closed.



*A temporary boiler is working to heat Red Hook Houses*



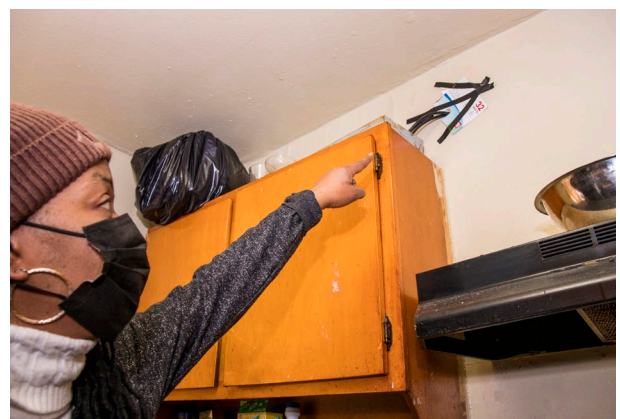
In addition to heat and hot water outages, Red Hook residents of 451 Columbia Street have endured monthslong electrical outages. Ms. EN reported that she had no power for weeks, then it turned on for one day and went out again. Her daughter, Ms. RN, is unable to work remotely due to constant issues with internet access and electrical outages.



*The Public Advocate and Council Member Avilés arrive at 451 Columbia St.*



*Ms. DL tells the Public Advocate about the building's power outages*



*Ms. DL shows the Public Advocate the temporary power cords in the building*



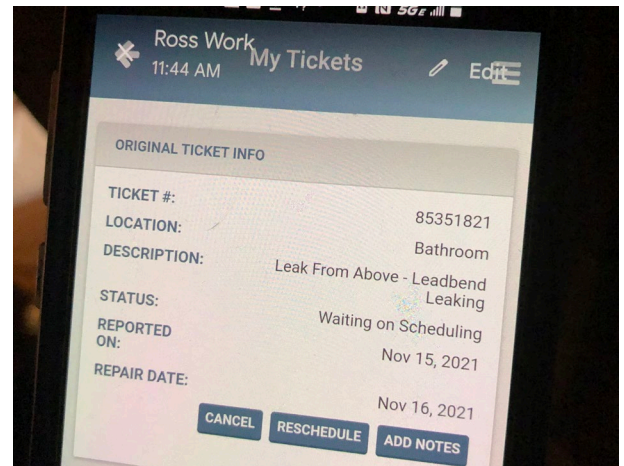


*A shattered window*



*Water damage surrounds a window after years of leaks*

After residents opened and logged repair tickets in the NYCHA Customer Call Center, the tickets were mysteriously closed and a scheduled date for repairs for a new ticket opened in November 2021. One resident, Ms. CP, was so tired of waiting for repairs of the leaky crumbling bathroom walls, she attempted to make her own repairs. She purchased plaster, but was not successful since the damage was too extensive.



*NYCHA Work Order #85351821*



*Ms. CP speaks to the Public Advocate and Council Member Alexa Avilés*



*Ms. CP must wear a coat even inside of her apartment*





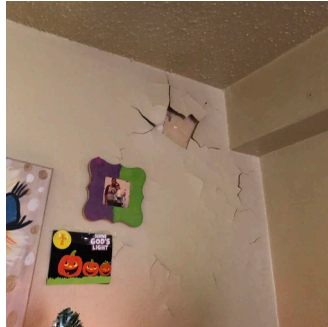
*Leaky, crumbling wall*



*Leaky bathroom ceiling*



*Leakage near a pipe*



*Crumbling wall*



*Resident purchased plaster*

## The Bronx: Fort Independence Houses



*Burst pipes*



*Moldy wall*

Residents living at Fort Independence Houses have been dealing with heat and hot water outages for years. Barbara Lauray, who is the president at Fort Independence Houses Resident Association, has worked tirelessly for the past several years to bring attention to the lack of heat and hot water, extreme water damages from burst pipes, mold, lead, and disrepair in the homes of residents living in the development. Residents reached out to Barbara regarding the no heat and no hot water service interruptions reports entered in NYCHA's Portal. Barbara was never informed by NYCHA staff about the Portal reports and was unaware until OPA informed her. Barbara, a very active Resident Association President, would have been able to track all the complaints through the Portal, if informed. A few years back, the Portal was created as



a result of the appointed federal monitor to improve communications between NYCHA staff and its residents with an existing building-wide systems problem. Upon information provided by NYCHA staff to the OPA, many staff did not know about the Portal or how to use it. Clearly, there is a disconnect. The disconnect is not just between NYCHA's central management staff and the residents, but between NYCHA's central and local management staff as well.



*Ms. TN speaks with the Public Advocate and Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson*



*Resident speaks about excess water damage*



*The Public Advocate hosts a press conference outside of Fort Independence Houses*

This development has a temporary boiler which cannot adequately heat the entire development and is always breaking down. Barbara stated that management worked on the boiler on January 26, 2022 and provided heat for that evening, but it was off again the next day and has remained off since.

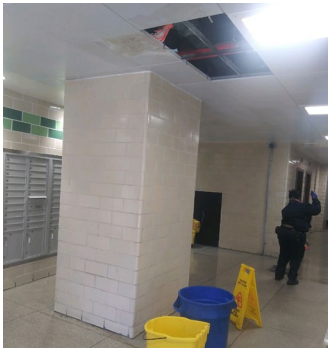
The management office informed residents that another temporary boiler was ordered but it “may

not” arrive for another week or two. Barbara said the development has been without heat for months. To cope with the cold, residents are using space heaters as well as ovens and stoves. This is an incredibly dangerous practice, especially for homes with young children.



*Temporary Boiler*

## Brooklyn: 303 Vernon Ave



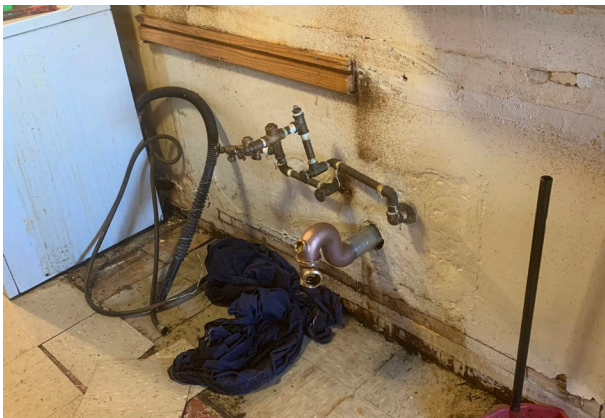
*Exposed leaky pipes*



*Exposed pipes*

NYCHA residents at 303 Vernon Avenue also have suffered from a consistent lack of hot water and heat during the winter months. In 2020, Denene Witherspoon who is the President of 303 Vernon Avenue Resident Association, reached out to the Office of the Public Advocate due to the gas outage in her building. She reported that ever since the pandemic started, the building – filled with elderly New Yorkers – has suffered from outage after outage. Due to plumbing issues, one resident has to scoop water out of her bathroom tub after each shower. Exposed pipes leak daily in the building's hallway. A blind resident on the first floor nearly tripped over the pail left to catch the constant leaks.

Ms. SI had a leak coming from under the kitchen sink, and NYCHA removed the sink and cabinets on January 2nd and a temporary sink was brought in days before the Public Advocate's visit on February 24th. There is extensive water damage in both Ms. SI's kitchen and two bathrooms. Water has been coming in from the ceiling and the walls.



*Missing sink*



*Temporary sink*



*Water damage on wall*



*Ceiling water damage*



*Water damage on wall*



*More water damage*





*Mr. OP speaks to the Public Advocate and Assemblymember Stefani Zinerman about the lack of heat in his apartment*

Another resident, Mr. OP, who has lived with his wife in the building for over 40 years and their apartment for over 20 years, has faced the same problems. There is no heat in the living room and bedroom. He put in several ticket orders and was told that maintenance would assist them, but never received any updates. When maintenance workers do come, they perform a visual inspection, and never return to actually do the work. Finally, Mr. OP was told that it was the boiler, but his apartment remained cold, and

he and his wife continue to wear coats to bed, use 4 blankets, and tape plastic over their windows to stay warm. Mr. OP has still never missed a rent payment.

### **Staten Island: Stapleton Houses**

From March 2021 to February 2022, 96 families at the Stapleton Houses on Staten Island were unable to use their stoves or ovens due to a gas outage in the building. NYCHA's old gas piping system created unsafe and hazardous conditions for residents, and the enactment of [Local Law 152-2016](#), forced management to reconstruct and upgrade the gas pipe systems to pass inspections in November of 2019. NYCHA failed to upgrade and comply with Local Law 152-2016, so the FDNY shut off the gas for the entire building.

During the gas outage, residents say there was always no heat or too much heat. While NYCHA provided the residents with hot plates for cooking, it failed to provide adequate hot plates for larger families and residents with dietary restrictions. Only one hot plate and one slow cooker was provided per household, irrespective of family size. Many residents were unable to prepare the specific food necessary for their health conditions or dietary restrictions. Residents relied on the use of extension cords and electrical connections to use space heaters, personal hot plates, microwaves, and air fryers – a dangerous combination.



*One family of six cooked their meals using just a hot plate, air fryer, and microwave*





*Electrical outlet*

Ms. KL had an electrical fire in her apartment and NYCHA has failed to make repairs. She had no electricity for several months. Another resident, who suffered from heat outages, said she resorted to using a stove to heat her apartment.

For over eight months, NYCHA was unable to provide answers to residents and the local management office on when the gas would be restored. Nearly a year later, NYCHA finally restored the cooking gas. Several residents have confirmed that their stoves and ovens are working again, but they have not been financially compensated from their year without gas.<sup>30</sup> One father still keeps hundreds of receipts from the food he had to buy to feed his children during that time.



*Nick E. Smith, First Deputy Public Advocate, hosts a press conference alongside fellow elected officials, community leaders, and residents outside of Stapleton Houses*



*Residents and community leaders speak at the press conference*

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.silive.com/news/2022/02/cooking-gas-expected-to-be-fully-restored-at-stapleton-houses-by-end-of-the-day.html>



## RECOMMENDATIONS

On February 8th, amid the heating and hot water outages, the Office of the Public Advocate released a list of [recommendations](#) to reform NYCHA's failing repair process. Months later, the Office has seen no improvement or change. The Public Advocate's Office continues to push for those still-critical changes along with following:

1. There should be an administrative process in place for residents to follow in disputing closed tickets when the work has not been completed. The process should conclude with a written document that determines whether the work was not completed and, if not, a return date for repairs must be scheduled, and a referral to the supervisors of the employee who closed the ticket without doing the work.
2. NYCHA should provide training to their staff and to all Resident Association leadership on the use of the [Service Interruption Portal](#).
3. Passage of the following legislative measures:
  - a. Amending Local Law 55-2018, the Healthy Homes Act, to include NYCHA;
  - b. Amending Local Law 127-2021 to mandate automatic inspections by NYC inspectors and the issuance of any building or housing code violations; and
  - c. Approval by the NYC Office of Management and Budget to allow NYCHA to utilize the Job Order Contract (JOC) for certain capital eligible projects that will assist in fast tracking much needed capital work so it is not subject to the long delays that are inherent in the federal procurement process.
  - d. Mandating that NYCHA, in advance of a resident meeting, provide one month's notice and proof thereof, that states the date and time when it will present at a Resident Association meeting on its upcoming capital work in that development.
4. Inspections to determine whether NYCHA is complying with Local Law 152-2016.
5. Complaints to 311 must trigger dispatching city inspectors to inspect NYCHA apartments, independently assess complaints, document housing authority violations as part of the city's violation databases, and be given a letter grade for each violation with the assigned time to cure the violation or incur monetary fines.

6. NYCHA must enforce and comply with Section 3 of the HUD Act of 1968. If OMB approves additional capital projects to go through the JOC process, then there are immediate opportunities to utilize Section 3 with the added benefit of employing people who live in or near NYCHA that look like or are the residents of NYCHA.
7. The metric used to hire contractors should be improved. NYCHA should develop a reliable list of contractors that can be used within their developments.
  - a. These contractors should be properly certified to do the job, have a good track record of quality work, as well as review their good track record contractor status on a regular basis.
  - b. NYCHA should provide a list of contractors who are banned from working in NYCHA based on previous shoddy and incomplete repairs, as well as work that was not completed on time.
8. NYCHA should scale the number of live-in supers to the number of residents and units at each building to ensure they are proportional to each other. Once the OPA receives previously requested headcount information from NYCHA, the OPA can recommend a number. For example, buildings can be grouped together to allow for three supers to be assigned to a designated number of residential units. Ideally, the three supers would be available to work a different 8 hour shift, thereby creating 24 hour coverage, and enabling them to address issues that arise outside of the 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. working hours.
  - a. NYCHA Buildings that are Senior Citizen Only buildings should have a super over 55 years old residing in the building if it meets the requisite number of units to have a live-in super. Otherwise it will get put in a cluster with other buildings that are not Senior Citizen only.
9. NYCHA should have security in senior citizen buildings.
10. NYCHA must have roof doors with silent working alarms that alert (management or the NYPD or both) when an unauthorized person opens the roof door, but it is silent so that it doesn't interfere with the quality of life of building residents. Currently, residents and non-residents both have access to the roof, which creates a dangerous living environment and puts residents at risk.
11. There should be greater investment in community based resources that can improve public safety in NYCHA houses.
  - a. In terms of security, public safety and other crisis management for NYCHA, resident councils were strongly in agreement with former Comptroller Scott Stringer's advocacy to reallocate additional funds for public safety in public housing, to reinvest in community safety programs and services.



- b. NYCHA's Woodside Houses and Astoria Houses piloted the city's successful crisis management system, which funds mediation and community services for people at risk of gun violence. This model must be expanded.

New York deserves more and it deserves better, and the Office of the Public Advocate believes these recommendations will be a step in the right direction towards housing dignity for all. The Public Advocate's Office will continue to work with NYCHA regarding the ongoing issues residents are experiencing to ensure that it will be resolved. New Yorkers deserve safe, comfortable, and deeply affordable housing.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**Red Hook Houses in Brooklyn (January 21, 2022):** Council Member Alexa Avilés, District 38 (Brooklyn); Karen Dawn Blondel, President of NYCHA Red Hook West Resident Association; Ross Joy, Director of Housing & Civil Justice at Red Hook Community Justice Center; Jacqui Painter, Founder & Director of Red Hook Relief

**Fort Independence Houses in the Bronx (February 8, 2022):** Council Member Pierina Ana Sanchez, District 14 (Bronx); Barbara Lauray, President of NYCHA Fort Independence Street-Heath Avenue Resident Association; Vanessa Gibson, Bronx Borough President;

NYC Comptroller Brad Lander Representative: Nina Saxon, Citywide Manager of NYCHA & Interfaith Communities; Ronald Harrison, Community Organizer at Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition

**Lincoln Houses in Manhattan (February 15, 2022):** Council Member Kristin Richardson Jordan, District 9 (Manhattan); Lea Potter, President of NYCHA Lincoln Houses Resident Association; Manhattan Borough President Office Mark Levine's Office Representative: Keisha Sutton-James, Deputy Manhattan Borough President; State Senator Cordell Cleare Representative: M. Ndigo Washington, Director of Community Affairs and Operations and Lafayette Moore aka Bro. Aziz, Community Affairs Liaison; Rafael Moure, Housing Organizers at Harlem Justice Center

**303 Vernon Ave. in Brooklyn (February 24, 2022):** Stefani Zinerman, NYS Assembly Member D56; Denene Witherspoon, President of NYCHA 303 Vernon Avenue Resident Association; Nina Saxon, Representative from Comptroller Brad Lander's Office; Henry Butler, Male District Leader D56 & District Manager CB #3; Kenesha Traynham-Cooper, Female District Leader D56; State Senator Julia Salazar Representative: Carlos Calzadilla, Director of Community Relations

**Conlon Lihfe Towers in Queens (March 8, 2022):** Council Member Nantasha Williams, District 27 (Queens); Joyce Hutton, President of NYCHA Conlon Lihfe Towers Resident Association; Queens Borough President, Donovan Richards Jr. Office Representative: Lisa Atkins, Director of Housing; NYS District 29 Assemblymember Alicia Hyndman Representative: Shana Gladden, Director of Constituent Services

**Stapleton Houses in Staten Island (March 22, 2022):** Council Member Kamillah Hanks, District 49 (Staten Island); Arlene Jeter, Vice President of NYCHA Stapleton Houses Resident Association; Minister Robert Perkins, Male District Leader 61st AD; Jasi Robinson, Female District Leader 61st AD; Comptroller Brad Lander's Office

